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ABSTRACT

To succeed, certain cautions must be observed for the practice of client-centered evaluation of administrators by teachers. First, it should not become contractually obligatory; second, at least part of the evaluation should be directed at the administrative team (at the building level) as a whole; and third, it should be used solely for the improvement of administrative performance, not to provide data for an administrator's personnel file. A program of this kind should go through nine steps: (1) agreement that the team wants feedback about its style and performance, (2) decision as to what information is desired and needed to improve performance, (3) choice and development of a feedback instrument, (4) field test of instrument, (5) communication of the purpose and form of the process to the faculty, (6) administration of the instrument, (7) tabulation and interpretation of the data, (8) cooperative use of the data to improve performance, and (9) evaluation of the total process. (Author/JG)

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Administrative Style and Performance as Teachers See Them

by
Neil Ellman

Client-centered evaluation in education is not new, but the idea began to be taken seriously during the late 1960's when students demanded a role in evaluating their teachers. Even before then, however, there were those (e.g., Weldy, 1961) who advocated faculty evaluation of administrators, and the practice has continued to receive some attention in professional literature (Gaslin, 1974; Sanacore, 1976 and 1977). In a growing number of instances, advocacy has become practice--Bay City, Texas; Chulsa Vista, California; Rome, Georgia; Springfield Township, Pennsylvania; Brookline, Massachusetts; Hauppauge, New York; and others. In Aurora, Colorado, and Berea, Ohio, the teachers associations and school boards have negotiated agreements that mandate such evaluation, and there have been state-wide efforts to write the practice into law.

The increasing popularity of these programs is an outgrowth of the narrowing gap of expertise between teachers and administrators (Boyan, 1969), and the erosion of traditional administrative prerogatives resulting from the growth of teacher militancy. As never before, teachers feel that they can and should evaluate their superiors. Indeed, an NEA teacher opinion poll (NEA, 1971) indicated that while teachers were generally unwilling to subject themselves to evaluation by students, an overwhelming majority of them felt that they should be

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involved in evaluating their evaluators. This enthusiasm has not been generally shared by administrators, for whom the prerogative to evaluate those below them in the educational hierarchy and be evaluated solely by those above them has been accepted as an article of faith.

Nevertheless, client-centered evaluation is not without merit. As administrators, we are responsible for evaluating the performance of teachers, but who better than the students themselves are aware of the day-to-day classroom behavior of their teachers? And our superiors are responsible for evaluating us, bu who betther than our teachers know how we behave during faculty meetings, fire drills, assemblies, and post-observation conferences? Furthermore, there is no reason to believe that, given the opportunity to say something about the style and performance of their administrators, teachers will be unfair, inaccurate, or vindictive.

If such evaluation is to succeed, however, there are certain cautions that must be observed. First, I do not believe that any kind of client-centered evaluation should become contractually obligatory. In addition to upsetting the authority structure that is necessary for a school to function properly, the codification of such evaluation is likely to pit administration against faculty, and each party will seek to negotiate evaluative criteria rather than choose them on the bases of reason, utility, and appropriateness.

Second, I do not believe that an administrator ought to be evaluated solely as an individual--although that, too, is surely

necessary. If we genuinely believe in the Administrative Team Concept, and adhere to the notion that our actions support and depend on the actions of others on the team, them it follows that administrators ought to be evaluated as a team, at least on the building level. Indeed, just as an individual develops an administrative style, the administrative team within a building tends to develop an image and style of its own, particularly when an effective principal has had the opportunity select and influence his staff. Evaluation based on team style has the advantage of reducing the danger of individuals directing and accepting criticism too personally.

The third caution is the most important, for it suggests that the primary purpose of evaluation must be the improvement of administrative performance. As such, teacher evaluation of administrators should be structured to provide information to administrators, not to provide evaluative judgments that become a permanent part of an administrator's personnel file. Perhaps, then, it is better to refrain from using the word "evaluation" and substitute "feedback" in its place. Placing the process in this more positive context also allows the flexibility to deal with administrative style as well as performance, for the subjectivity that must be directed toward the former would no longer be feared.

With this said, and accepting the proposition that feedback from teacher- can be a valuable source of information for the improvement of administrative performance, as well as for the establishment of trust and communication with the faculty, I am proposing a nine-step process that is specific enough to serve as a model but general enough

to be adapted to any local situation and set of needs:

STEP 1 -- As an administrative team, agree that you want feedback about your administrative style and performance, and that you are willing to commit yourself to such a program. The risk is that egos will be bruised, and the commitment needed may involve time and effort that could be spent on other profitable pursuits. The unity of the decision is critical because an individual commitment can lead to dissension among administrators and the charge that the individual is attempting to ingratiate himself with the faculty at the expense of his colleagues. Additionally, do not allow a third party to foist the program on the team. The data are for your use and benefit; and without your total belief in the program, the most meaningful data will not be put to their best use.

STEP 2 -- Again, as an administrative team, decide what you want to know about yourselves, and what you need to know in order to do a better job. You will probably have to consider the school and district philosophy, board policies and regulations, and your job descriptions. It would also be helpful to elicit the expectations of your superiors, students, teachers, and parents. Do not accept another district's or individual's standards for the job you are doing.

STEP 3 -- Choose and develop a means of gathering feedback. Although interviews and other direct methods can be used, a structured questionnaire (including a place for additional comments) is best: it can be given to all teachers, anonymity

can be guaranteed, and the results can easily be tabulated. Careful construction is essential, for the questionnaire should be clear and simple enough to complete in a short span of time. Although previously developed instruments can be used as models (e.g., Stemnock, 1973), it is important to develop your own form based on your own needs.

STEP 4 -- Field test the instrument on a small group of teachers, posssibly from outside your school. After determining the clarity of the statements and the ease or difficulty of administration, make any necessary adjustments.

STEP 5 -- Carefully introduce and explain the feedback process to the entire faculty--why you are doing it, what you hope to gain, and so forth. Every question should be anticipated:

"Can I give a 4½ on a 5-point scale?"

"Do I have to participate?"

"Do I have to answer all the questions?"

"Do you really believe that this is going to improve you?"

"How does this help us?"

"Does this mean that next year students will be evaluating us?"

The responses to such questions will depend on your individual situation, but it is critical to gain the support of the faculty and allay their fears. For example, teachers may resist the process because they fear negative reaction from administrators receiving negative feedback. Only complete openness about the program can eliminate such fear; and if there is not some such openness at the outstart, perhaps it is best to delay this process.

STEP 6 -- Administer the questionnaire at one sitting--for instance, at a faculty meeting. Distribution through mailboxes will result in fewer responses, and some teachers may resent doing your survey on their time.

STEP 7 -- Tabulate the data and interpret them as an administrative team. To do otherwise would be to invite divisiveness; and unless the team agrees on the meaning of the data, it cannot begin to use the information in a concerted and organized way. Even information about an individual should be handled in this way, for individual behavior cannot be modified without considering its impact on other individuals, and it is best modified in an atmosphere of mutual concern and effort. This requires trust among the members of the administrative team; and if such trust is lacking, there is no need for a survey to discover other problems.

STEP 8 -- Use the data to improve your administrative performance. Unless you make an honest effort to change, the process is worthless, and your credibility with the staff will be diminished. Again, efforts for change will have to be chosen and participated in cooperatively.

STEP 9 -- Evaluate the total process; and if necessary, alter or abandon it. In doing so, remember that feedback should result in improvement; but remember, too, that the process itself has enormous value for its participants.

A critical issue in the development of such a program involves the

acquisition and use of this feedback data by the teachers themselves. It can be argued that if militant teachers receive the data, they may be able to use it against administrators; but it can also be argued that unless teachers receive the data, they will be less willing to participate in the process, which will be perceived as advantageous to the administration rather than to the whole staff. My own view is that the teachers need to be made aware of the results of the survey, but not necessarily all the results. If properly done, the survey will provide more information than the administrative team can possibly use at one time. In practice, then, the team will have to select one problem or complex of problems for its attention, and it would not be dangerous for the faculty to learn that they had identified this problem as critical. Indeed, this is inevitable if the faculty is expected to participate in solving the problem. The advantages of partial feedback is that a small, militant group will not be able to choose its own data (from among many) to support its own views, and that the process will focus on a problem that will actually be addressed in a concerted and cooperative manner.

Surely, questions like this one are inevitable in a process that is unfamiliar and potentially threatened to established interests, but they are not unanswerable. Problems will develop, and the process has as much chance of failing as succeeding. Nevertheless, it is worth attempting, for there is untold value in seeing ourselves as others see us.

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